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ABSTRACT

Concerned with the freedom to teach and learn, this document offers guideline procedures for avoiding censorship disputes and for dealing with controversies which surround these issues. The experience and advice of several superintendents, principals, librarians, teachers, and curriculum workers who have recently been involved in textbook censorship controversies are brought together. Their opinions and suggestions are offered to focus attention on community and school circumstances before a problem develops. The key to avoiding major disputes is the establishment and use of a formal, definitive, written procedure for the evaluation and selection of materials. A sample procedure policy is provided which emphasizes comprehensive objectives, direct board responsibility, strong curriculum-based selection criteria, high level professional review procedures, an advisory committee appointed by the board or superintendent that includes students and parents, and a specific outline of policy and action on challenged materials. Should a complaint arise, suggestions for dealing with it include moving the controversy to the school board level in order to avoid any parent-teacher-principal conflict, and defending the professional selection process rather than the individual piece of instructional material. (Author/DE)

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Introduction

The selection and adoption of educational materials is one of the school's most important and controversial tasks. The potential for complaints and challenges concerning the materials is a very real threat to the professional educators' efforts to provide the best learning tools and atmosphere for their students.

Escalating protests of individual books, learning series, and other materials means that your school's policies and programs should be examined and re-examined regularly.

This report brings together the experience of several superintendents, principals, librarians, teachers, curriculum workers, educational association staffers, and others who have been personally involved in recent protest and challenge situations. Their opinions and suggestions are offered to help you focus attention on your own circumstances, before a problem develops. We also present sample selection policies, complaint procedures, and guidelines to implement active community involvement programs.

One Virginia educator summed it up rather well when he said, "Perhaps, if we had been really on top of it, we could have had some strong citizen support at the first board meeting when the challenge was scheduled, but that would have required a lot of foresight. The original attack was like a bolt from the blue."

The threat of censorship is a real one. As one New England curriculum worker said, "It doesn't just happen in coal mining communities in the Southern mountains. It happens in sophisticated, suburban communities like the one I work in."

A Midwestern librarian, who was the victim of a particularly brutal episode, explained the problem of being unprepared. "I was at a regular board meeting when one member brought up a complaint about a book and they went into executive session to hear portions of it read. Our school board didn't know there was a selection policy until after it happened."

And the personal nature of a challenge came from a Midwestern superintendent. "They may not use dynamite as they have in West Virginia, but there will be harassing [illegible] calls in the middle of the night and obscene letters [illegible] our family, which are very upsetting."

The potential problem of complaints and protests exists everywhere. In large and small schools, urban and rural districts, in all grades, and in all economic and geographical areas, the pressure is on intellectual freedom. If it isn't at your school, it might be soon.

Sample Policies

The key to avoiding major disputes is the establishment and use of a formal, definitive, written procedure for the evaluation and selection of materials. The following sample, approved by the Board of Directors of the American Association of School Librarians at the American Library Association Midwinter Conference, Chicago, 1970, is used by many districts. The statement directs itself to the library in several sections, but it is equally applicable to the English or Social Studies program with minor modifications. There are several points of emphasis: comprehensive objectives; direct board responsibility; strong curriculum-based criteria; high level professional review procedures; an advisory committee appointed by the board or superintendent that includes students and parents; and a specific outline of policy and action on challenged materials.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The following statement of policy making with regard to instructional materials selection for the school library media center is offered as a guide for the formulation of a policy. It is believed that such a policy should be formally adopted by each school district as a basis for consistent excellence in choice of materials and as a document that can be presented to parents and other citizens for their further understanding of the purposes and standards of selection of these materials.

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Patterns of Policy Making

The governing body of a school is legally responsible for all matters relating to the operation of that school. It is recommended that assumption of responsibility and the delegation of the authority for the selection of instructional materials should be adopted by the legally responsible body and then stated in a formal policy to the professionally trained personnel employed by the school.

Selection of Personnel

The responsibility for coordination of the selection of instructional materials for the school's library media center should rest with the professionally trained media personnel. Administration, faculty, students, and parents should be involved in the selection process. Final decision on purchases should rest with the professional personnel in accordance with formally adopted policy.

Types of Materials Covered

Criteria for evaluation and selection of all types of instructional materials should be established. Such criteria should be available in written form.

Criteria of Selection

The primary objective of a school library is to implement, enrich, and support the educational program of the school. Criteria for instructional materials should implement this basic objective.

Criteria for the selection of all instructional materials are both general, as found in the professional literature, and specific in terms of the needs of each school community.

General criteria are stated in terms of significant descriptors of the subject; integrity of treatment; and quality of the medium-style, clarity, originality, etc.

Specific criteria are determined by a study of the characteristics of the school's instructional program and the needs of the students as affected by the community as follows:

- Needs of the individual school program based on knowledge of the curriculum and on requests from administrators and teachers
- Needs of the individual student based on knowledge of children and youth and requests by parents and students.

Needs from these several sources will require a whole range of instructional materials for an acceptance level of quality, on all levels of difficulty, and with a diversity of appeal; and the presentation of different points of view—ethnic, religious, political, and cultural.

Selection Tools

Reputable, unbiased, professionally prepared selection aids should be consulted as guides.

Challenged Materials

A procedure should be established for consideration of an action on criticism of materials by individuals or groups. An example of such a procedure follows later.

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMS

Media personnel are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end the American Association of School Librarians asserts that the responsibility of the school library media center is:

To provide a comprehensive collection of instructional materials selected in compliance with basic, written selection principles, and to provide maximum accessibility to these materials.

To provide materials that will support the curriculum, taking into consideration the individuals' needs, and the varied interests, abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and maturity levels of the students served.

To provide materials for teachers and students that will encourage growth in knowledge, and that will develop literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation and ethical standards.

To provide materials which reflect the ideas and beliefs of religious, social, political, historical, and ethnic groups and their contribution to the American and world heritage and culture, thereby enabling students to develop an intellectual integrity in forming judgments.

To provide a written statement, approved by the local boards of education, of the procedures for meeting the challenge of censorship of materials in school library media centers.

To provide qualified professional personnel to serve teachers and students.

POLICIES FOR SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Objectives of Selection

The primary objective of the school's educational media center is to implement, enrich and support the educational program of the school. It is the duty of the center to provide a wide range of materials on all levels of difficulty, with diversity of appeal, and the presentation of different points of view.

To this end, the Board of Education of_____reaffirms the objectives of the Standards for School Media Programs and asserts that the responsibility of the school media center library is:

To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of the students served.

To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards.

To provide a background of information which will enable students to make intelligent judgments in their daily life.

To provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that young citizens may develop under guidance the practice of critical analysis of all media.

To provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contribution to our American heritage.

To place principle above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive collection appropriate for the users of the library media center.

Responsibility for Selection of Materials

The_____Board of Education is legally responsible for all matters relating to the operation of_____schools.

The responsibility for the selection of instructional materials is delegated to the professionally trained personnel employed by the school system.

Selection of materials involves many people: principals, teachers, supervisors, and media specialists. The responsibility for coordinating the selection of instructional materials and making the recommendations for purchase rests with the professionally trained media personnel.

Criteria for Selection of Instructional Materials

Needs of the individual school based on knowledge of the curriculum and of the existing collection are given first consideration.

Materials for purchase are considered on the basis of: overall purpose, timeliness or permanence, importance of the subject matter, quality of the writing/production, readability and popular appeal, authoritativeness, reputation of the publisher/producer, reputation and significance of the author/artist/composer/producer, etc., and format and price.

Requests from faculty and students are also given consideration.

Procedures for Selection

In selecting materials for purchase the media specialist evaluates the existing collection and consults reputable, unbiased, professionally prepared selection aids; specialists from all departments and/or all grade levels; the media committee appointed by the principal to serve in an advisory capacity in the selection of materials.

In specific areas the media specialist follows these procedures: Gift materials are judged by the basic selection standards and are accepted or rejected by those standards; multiple items of outstanding and much in demand media are purchased as needed; worn or missing standard items are replaced periodically; out-of-date or no longer useful materials are withdrawn from the collection; sets of materials and materials acquired by subscription are examined carefully, and are purchased only to fill a definite need; salesmen must have permission from the superintendent's office before going into any of the schools.

Challenged Materials

Occasional objections to a selection will be made by the public, despite the care taken to select valuable materials for student and teacher use and the qualifications of persons who select the materials.

The principles of the freedom to read and of the professional responsibility of the staff must be defended, rather than the materials.

A file is kept on materials which are likely to be questioned or considered controversial.

If a complaint is made, the procedures are as follows:

1. Be courteous, but make no commitments.
2. Invite the complainant to file his or her objections in writing and offer to send him or her a prepared questionnaire, such as the one shown on page 5, so that he or she may submit a formal complaint to the media committee.
3. Determine whether materials may be sufficiently in question to immediately withdraw the material pending a decision of the media committee.
4. Inform the superintendent and the media supervisor.
5. The media committee will: read and examine the materials referred to it; check general acceptance of the materials by reading reviews; weigh values and faults against each other and form opinions based on the material as a whole and not on passages pulled out of context; meet to discuss the material and to prepare a report on it; file a copy of the report in the school and administrative offices.

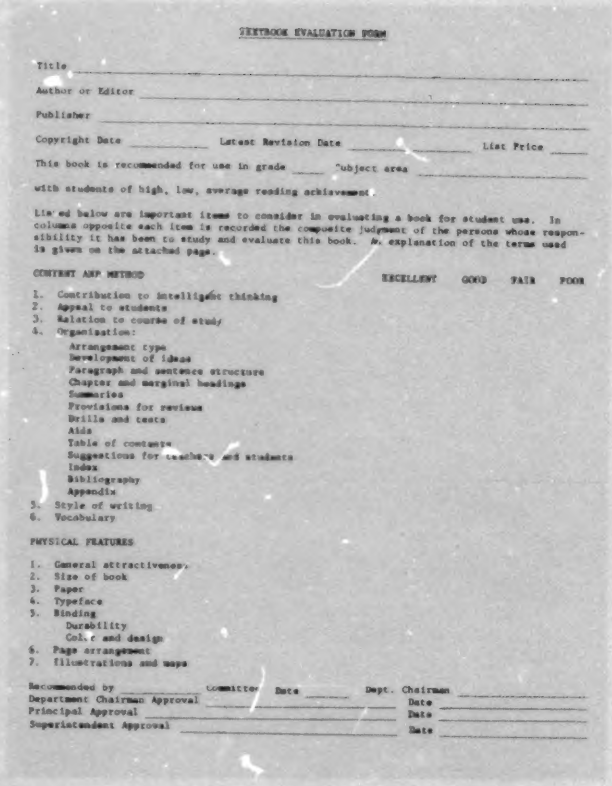
It is obvious to school administrators throughout the nation that renewed and increased attention must be given to the area encompassing the adoption of textbooks and other materials used in the curriculum. The recent events in various sections of the nation make this clearly evident. AASA believes strongly in the principle that members of the community must be involved in the formulation of school system policies and procedures. Such citizen input should be made through carefully developed and equitable procedures to the board of education and professional administrators so their decisions might be sharpened and refined in terms of providing each student with an appropriate and quality educational program.

—Paul B. Salmon, Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators

The selection and evaluation of textual materials requires many of the same considerations as the library media center materials with some additions. Many of the additional requirements focus on the actual competition between publishers and the procedures for handling those details. There is also a basic difference in evaluation which is exemplified by the following excerpt from a Mid-western policy statement:

> The subject materials to be evaluated shall be determined upon the following basis. Principals and teachers shall make recommendations by November 10 of each school year in which they indicate the subject areas which need study. These suggestions shall be considered in the light of such factors as: objectives of the course of study, content, year of original adoption, copyright date and availability, physical condition of books now in use. The superintendent shall make final recommendation for study of textual materials to the board of education for their consideration.

Most of the textbook selection outlines also provide for a form to be used in the evaluation of individual books. A sample from the New England area is shown.



TEXTBOOK EVALUATION FORM

Title _____

Author or Editor _____

Publisher _____

Copyright Date _____ Latest Revision Date _____ List Price _____

This book is recommended for use in grade _____ Subject area _____

with students of high, low, average reading achievement.

Listed below are important items to consider in evaluating a book for student use. In columns opposite each item is recorded the composite judgment of the persons whose responsibility it has been to study and evaluate this book. An explanation of the terms used is given on the attached page.

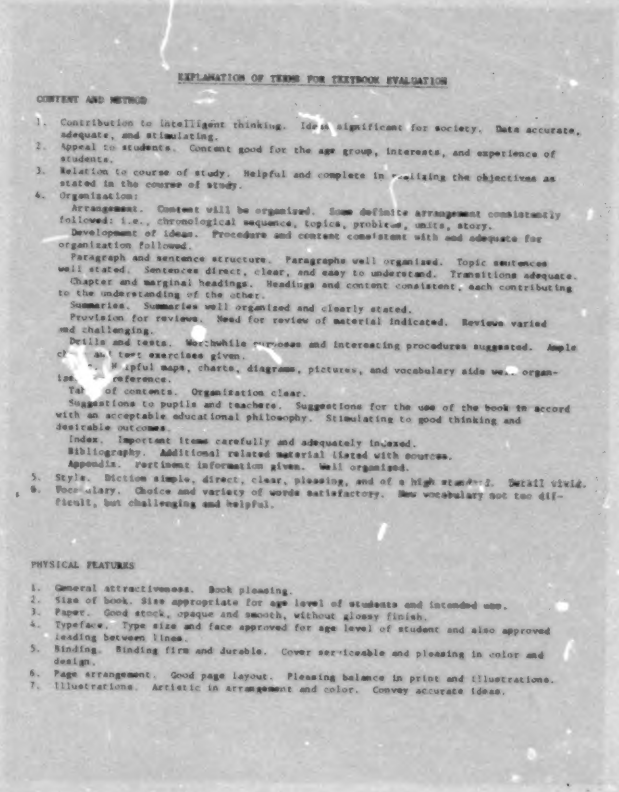
CONTENT AND METHOD	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
1. Contribution to intelligent thinking				
2. Appeal to students				
3. Relation to course of study				
4. Organization:				
Arrangement type				
Development of ideas				
Paragraph and sentence structure				
Chapter and marginal headings				
Summaries				
Provisions for reviews				
Drills and tests				
Aids				
Table of contents				
Suggestions for teachers and students				
Index				
Bibliography				
Appendix				
5. Style of writing				
6. Vocabulary				
PHYSICAL FEATURES				
1. General attractiveness				
2. Size of book				
3. Paper				
4. Typeface				
5. Binding				
Durability				
Color and design				
6. Page arrangement				
7. Illustrations and maps				

Recommended by _____ Committee Date _____ Dept. Chairman _____

Department Chairman Approval _____ Date _____

Principal Approval _____ Date _____

Superintendent Approval _____ Date _____



EXPLANATION OF TERMS FOR TEXTBOOK EVALUATION

CONTENT AND METHOD

1. Contribution to intelligent thinking. Ideas significant for society. Data accurate, adequate, and stimulating.
2. Appeal to students. Content good for the age group, interests, and experience of students.
3. Relation to course of study. Helpful and complete in realizing the objectives as stated in the course of study.
4. Organization:
   Arrangement. Content well be organized. Some definite arrangement consistently followed: i.e., chronological sequence, topics, problems, units, story.
   Development of ideas. Procedure and content consistent with and adequate for organization followed.
   Paragraph and sentence structure. Paragraphs well organized. Topic sentences well stated. Sentences direct, clear, and easy to understand. Transitions adequate.
   Chapter and marginal headings. Headings and content consistent, each contributing to the understanding of the other.
   Summaries. Summaries well organized and clearly stated.
   Provision for reviews. Need for review of material indicated. Reviews varied and challenging.
   Drills and tests. Worthwhile purposes and interesting procedures suggested. Ample choice of text exercises given.
   Aids. Helpful maps, charts, diagrams, pictures, and vocabulary aids well organized for reference.
   Table of contents. Organization clear.
   Suggestions to pupils and teachers. Suggestions for the use of the book in accord with an acceptable educational philosophy. Stimulating to good thinking and desirable outcomes.
   Index. Important items carefully and adequately indexed.
   Bibliography. Additional related material listed with sources.
   Appendix. Pertinent information given. Well organized.
5. Style. Diction simple, direct, clear, pleasing, and of a high standard. Detail vivid.
6. Vocabulary. Choice and variety of words satisfactory. New vocabulary not too difficult, but challenging and helpful.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

1. General attractiveness. Book pleasing.
2. Size of book. Size appropriate for age level of students and intended use.
3. Paper. Good stock, opaque and smooth, without glossy finish.
4. Typeface. Type size and face approved for age level of student and also approved leading between lines.
5. Binding. Binding firm and durable. Cover serviceable and pleasing in color and design.
6. Page arrangement. Good page layout. Pleasing balance in print and illustrations.
7. Illustrations. Artistic in arrangement and color. Convey accurate ideas.

Several of the leaders interviewed mentioned the same point in dealing with a complaint or a question about a selected book. One suburban superintendent said it very well. "The key to dealing with controversial issues is being able to stay calm and cool, knowing that there is an excellent supporting staff of professionals with whom to work. We have urged our staff to never overreact. Also, we have tried to always let the public know that we are providing materials on opposing sides of almost every controversial issue. It sometimes takes people aback when they know that we are willing to help them present their side of an issue, even though we think it is wrong."

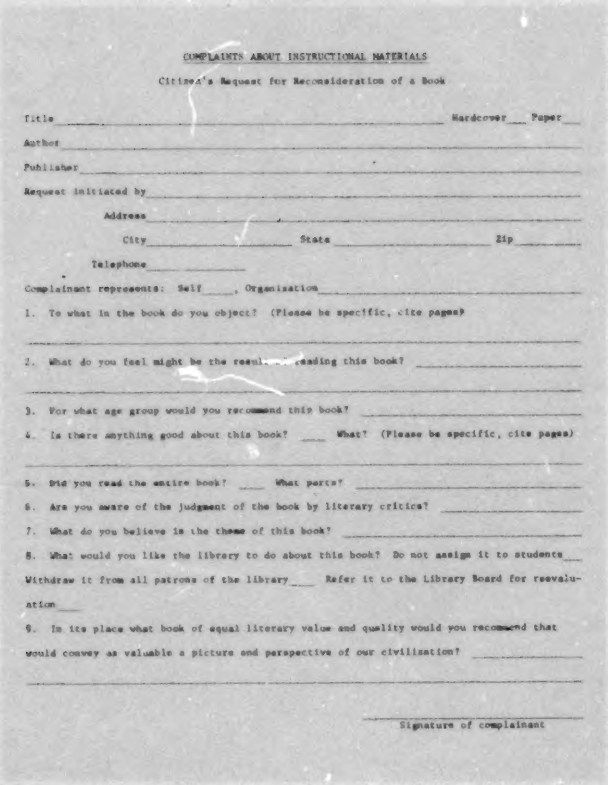
Being able to handle things in a calm and cool manner requires having a form for translating a verbal complaint into a formal written protest. The following sample was prepared by the National Council of Teachers of English and many systems have adopted it, or modified it slightly for their own needs. It serves for complaints about social studies texts as well as those about library materials and books assigned for English classes.

The professional committee established to review the complaints should be broadly representative of the

Copies of the NEA Inquiry Panel's report on the I
available.

The report is the result of a three-day open heari
by the NEA. Panel members represented the Associa
Development, National Council for Social Studies, A
Council of Churches, and Marshall University, as we

The 87-page booklet, *A Textbook Study in Cultu*
Order Department, The Academic Building, Saw Mill
Include the stock number, 1352-2-00, when you order



COMPLAINTS ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book

Title _____ Hardcover___ Paper___

Author _____

Publisher _____

Request initiated by _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Complainant represents: Self ____, Organization _____

1. To what in the book do you object? (Please be specific, cite pages)

_____

2. What do you feel might be the result of reading this book? _____

_____

3. For what age group would you recommend this book? _____

4. Is there anything good about this book? ____ What? (Please be specific, cite pages)

_____

5. Did you read the entire book? ____ What parts? _____

6. Are you aware of the judgment of the book by literary critics? _____

7. What do you believe is the theme of this book? _____

8. What would you like the library to do about this book? Do not assign it to students___ Withdraw it from all patrons of the library___ Refer it to the Library Board for reevaluation___

9. In its place what book of equal literary value and quality would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of our civilization? _____

_____

_____

Signature of complainant

selection committee. One West Coast district has written the following regulation to form the committee.

SPECIAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

The committee shall consist of the district superintendent, ex officio; the assistant superintendent in whose division the material or practice exists, who will serve as chairman.

If the practice or material is instructional in nature and exists at the elementary level, two certificated employee organization.

If the practice is instructional in nature and exists at the high school level, the coordinator from each high school in the district who works in the area in which the material or practice is used, an administrator from high school level, the secondary and elementary directors of curriculum planning, and a representative of the PTA, chosen by that organization.

If the practice or material is instructional in nature and exists at the elementary level, two teachers from the appropriate grade level, an elementary principal, the director of curriculum planning for elementary schools, and a representative of the PTA, chosen by that body.

There shall be a provision for a majority and a minority report. Following the recommendation of the committee to the superintendent, he or she will submit the committee report along with recommendations to the board of education for consideration and action.

One policy that several educators thought was a good one was that of having a citizens' advisory committee. One Plains state district outlined its advisory panel as follows:

THE CITIZENS' ADVISORY TEXTBOOK COMMITTEE

The purpose of the committee is to study the textbooks recommended by the local selecting committee for use in the schools and to make recommendations to the coordinator of instruction relating to the textbooks to the end that there shall be in use in the school district the highest quality textbooks available.

The school board concept of highest quality textbooks is:

1. Textbooks that in the opinion of the local selecting committee present the subject matter in the most effective manner consistent with our philosophy of education.

2. Textbooks that, whenever possible, promote pride, confidence, and trust in the democratic principles upon which our country is founded.

3. Textbooks that refrain from partisan presentation of controversial issues.

4. Textbooks that are neither racist nor sexist in nature.

5. Textbooks that, whenever possible, are interesting, well illustrated, current, and appropriate.

This committee is advisory in nature and is appointed to study textbooks and make recommendations with particular emphasis on subject headings 2-5 of the school board concepts of highest quality textbooks.

The committee will be composed of three to six members appointed by the board to serve for a period of one adoption. The committee will meet on the call of the coordinator of instruction and remain active until recommendations are submitted to the superintendent of schools. Committee recommendations are to be made to the coordinator of instruction in writing. Special joint meetings with the local selecting committee may be called by the coordinator of instruction.

ort on the Kanawha County textbook conflict are

pen hearing conducted in Charleston, West Virginia
e Association for Supervision and Curriculum
Studies, American Library Association, National
ity, as well as the National Education Association.
y in Cultural Conflict, may be ordered from the NEA
, Saw Mill Road, West Haven, Connecticut 06516.
you order. The price is $2.00.

Handling a Complaint

There were many suggestions for the long range prevention of major controversies, falling into five main areas.

1. Establish a broad range of professionals in the school to select the materials, preventing any one individual's oversight.

2. Present real and logical alternatives when a course is obviously controversial, offering the student and the parents an early opportunity to select.

3. Provide strong administrative regulations to deal with complaints, ensuring immediate action for the complaint or appeal.

4. Move the controversy to the school board level as soon as it appears that the building level staff will not be able to solve the problem, avoiding any teacher-parent-principal conflict.

5. Defend the professional practice of your school system, not any individual material in question.

First, nearly everyone suggested avoiding a controversy before it starts. A superintendent in Ohio advised, "Involve a very broad spectrum of people in your input on book selection. In our two high schools we have all the English department people and the librarians from both schools work on what is going into a course. This procedure prevents one individual teacher or administrator from putting in objectionable material on his own."

A former principal and veteran of a recent complaint situation suggested an additional approach. "You have to have parents in the selection process and I think it is good to have student representatives in at the high school level. However, we have both on our selection committee and we still had a large problem. It isn't the total answer, but at least it gives some legitimacy to the whole thing if you say you did have the community represented. It's certainly better than not being able to make a reference to that sort of thing."

"An awful lot of things can be done in a community where there has been a continuous communication between a good professional staff and most of the people," explained a Midwestern superintendent. "We encourage the community to use our facilities. The libraries are open at night and we have the community college sharing our buildings. If we hadn't had that kind of positive relationship we would have been dead. You get most of the community on your side to start with and then try not to get too upset when there are complaints from a small group."

A principal felt differently, though. "We don't ask people to come in and help us censor books. We think the job of selection of books and other materials belongs to the professional staff and don't ask parents to assist them."

A curriculum supervisor said, "It certainly can help to disarm critics if they are on study committees, particularly in subject areas where people have some worries or ones which might be controversial or that you feel need a wide base of support to be successful." He described a drug education program which included parents, doctors, law enforcement officials, politicians, and the school professionals in drafting the curriculum. It turned out so watered down and bland that the students laughed at it. He felt it would have been better to have no course at all than the sanitized one.

> We are currently witnessing a number of clashes between schools and their communities. These conflicts have taken place over a variety of issues. One, however, that we may well be hearing a great deal more about in the future is the issue of textbook selection and use. It is the belief of NAESP that, if we are to prevent the fabric of communities from being torn apart, it is now more important than ever that educators take the initiative in framing educational issues for thoughtful public debate as well as in assuring the proper involvement of citizens in developing school policies. At the same time, as educators we must not forget that there may be times when unreasoned demands of certain pressure groups come into conflict with the educational welfare of students. In such instances, we must be prepared to take strong stands in keeping with our commitment to provide the highest quality education for all children. In each of these roles, educators will be called on to assume an unprecedented degree of expertise and leadership.
>
> *—William L. Pharis, Executive Director, National Association of Elementary School Principals*

Second, several educators suggested a plan used in handling sex education courses several years ago be used to deal with any topic which might cause strong community reaction. This is to allow the parents to take their children out of certain courses with a note of explanation.

A superintendent who handled several challenges a few years ago outlined his program. "If an area or course or even a book is known to be controversial we provide information regarding that to the parents ahead of time so they can opt to put their child in that course or not. We offer an alternative, a logical and academically viable alternative. The best person to have on your side is the student. We have them involved in the selection of courses and teachers and that often helps the student disarm parents who might want to complain or criticize."

Third, everyone interviewed stressed that the school board must prepare a policy statement and issue a definite pattern to use in handling controversial material, coupled with strong administrative regulations to implement those policies. There are samples of these earlier in this report. The central point was that with an established procedure you are armed for the first complaint and don't lose the first battle because of surprise.

An educator from the West Coast put it simply, "We have a procedure for any parent who objects to any book of any kind. They can file a complaint. We have a form which every principal and every librarian has in their office. If the parent voices any complaint or objection to anything we just say, 'Now you file a written complaint

and we will get to work on it.' We want the complaint in writing, so they give us the form. Then we present the complaint to a committee, still a committee of professionals, who review the complaint and recommend to the superintendent whether to keep it [the book] or not."

A Midwestern librarian defined the focus of policy and regulations. "You have to have a definite statement from the board on how to handle controversial literature, on how books are to be selected, and how to handle complaints. Then you have to design the administrative regulations to make those policies work."

Another Midwesterner described the major danger in dealing with board policy. "The important thing about a school board's policy is that once they have made it, they stick to it. Our board has vacillated and allowed teachers to be attacked personally in board meetings. A board which doesn't enforce its policies is worse than no board at all."

The procedures for review of materials had one feature which all agreed on, taking the materials off the shelf or out of the classroom while the review is in progress. "We take the book off the shelf until they have looked at it. The complainant gets action right away, there isn't any delay at all. Most of the materials go right back on the shelf, but others have stayed off. I think we have been very fair. The review committee has usually been the learning center director, the assistant superintendent for program, and the supervisors and teachers in a related area. A high quality professional group," outlined a superintendent.

One Southern source suggested a "time delay" be built into the board's policy statement to allow for a cooling-off period between the presentation of a complaint and the final decision on the matter. Another suggested that the parent have an immediate recourse at the building level, from the teacher to the principal. He felt that a great many complaints could be taken care of with a quick personal conference, while a more formal procedure might inflate the problem.

Fourth, once there is a formal complaint most superintendents and principals felt it should be moved out of the building and on to the school board as soon as possible. One said, "You have to make sure that the complaining parents understand that they have options for their child, but so does every other parent in the district. The complainant must be shown that they can't expect to take away any options from other parents and children. If we can't teach a certain book, then it is removing certain options from the other parents. We emphasize the democratic aspect of the situation. The people who say it isn't good for anybody have the option of not having it taught to their child, but the other parents have the option of having it taught to their children."

Fifth, the defense of the professional selection process and not the individual piece of instructional material which has been challenged was one important concept that almost all of the veterans mentioned. "We are defending the freedom to read and not the materials," said one superintendent. "Now that is what we believe and that is the first thing that I say to them, 'Look, I am not trying to defend that book, but the right to read it and the professional responsibility of my staff I'll defend right down the line.'"

Some suggested that contacts in the news and communications media, as well as general community leaders, could be very helpful if a situation expanded into more than a building or simple board problem. "We did a lot of work with the local TV stations and the newspapers. We tried to drum up as much support in the community as possible," said a Southern educator. Information on school board policy and administrative regulations can be explained to news personnel and then they have an understanding of the situation before it happens, and perhaps can add support.

Another educator who has just completed a compromise settlement said that he thinks these things should be kept as local as possible. "It seems as if the group was looking for nothing more than state-wide and national attention. They were communicating with people in Kanawha County, West Virginia; with a John Birch group in New York State, at least they distributed publications of the John Birch Society. We didn't go out of our way to make a big fight of it, we wanted to stay small and calm."

A candid self-assessment of your school's program for selection and review of complaints might be the best way to defuse a situation before it starts. The policies presented earlier are models to explore.

One pitfall mentioned by those interviewed was the error of running away from a problem or acting defensively. They emphasized that the right to freedom in selecting materials by professionals must be strengthened, not weakened, at all times. "We found that here, since we have had five textbook controversies in a row, that trying to placate the extremists by putting in procedures to suit them is wrong. They just seem to get a taste for blood. Each time they moved it got worse. First it was a couple of books, then they said, 'After we get these two books out there are 20 more, and then 20 more after that.' It just doesn't pay to give in."

> It is always unfortunate for students to have controversial instructional materials withdrawn from the schools. Such action diminishes the school's reputation for treating issues truthfully and openly. If the board of education acquiesces to public pressure, the students in the district will be denied access to all sides of the truth.
>
> Professional educators realize how destructive a few people can be, despite well laid plans for screening and orderly review of materials that are questioned by the community. It is essential that the board be thoroughly familar with, and committed to, its adopted policy on the issue of controversial materials.
>
> The board must ensure that it receives the professional educators' point of view on the academic aspects of instructional materials as well as the parents' and citizens' responses. The board must then make a decision based on the public's suggestions, the professionals' recommendations, and the students' interest.
>
> *—Gordon Cawelti, Executive Director Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*

Conclusions

There are several motivations attributed to the complaints which most of those interviewed had dealt with, ranging from sincere beliefs to political opportunism.

"The people who were really upset about this were fundamentalist and quite sincere about the whole thing. They were concerned about what they saw as sacrilegious or in some way against God. They were not very well educated people, but convinced of their own belief. They found it hard to understand why public schools shouldn't echo their own beliefs. They are very sincere and I don't know how you combat them. Perhaps by getting equally sincere people on the other side," said a veteran of a recent textbook challenge.

Another explained it in similar terms, "They see their children watching things on TV that are very different from the way they believe and they see their children reflecting some of the things which they hear in popular music. They feel that those areas are far out of their control, but that the taxes they pay for the schools are close at hand and they are going to get those textbooks out of the classroom.

"It is a group which sees society going away from it in its trends and that is quite upsetting. The protesting is one way of yelling out and saying, 'Stop it!'

"Given time to work on these things they will settle down, they have here already."

On the other extreme there are examples of local political groups using the issue of books in the schools and libraries as objects in larger strategies, just as they use the issues of redistricting and busing.

One expert in the field made a slightly cynical, but accurate assessment of the problem of censorship. "I think that what you will find if you look into this in any depth is that when you are dealing with reasonable people the political process will work, regardless of what it is—fairly elaborate or merely a modicum of participation by personnel in a review or selection committee. But the situations which are surfacing now are much the same as we had back with the sex education program. We are dealing with the extreme viewpoints and their position is one of no compromise and no negotiation and then no democratic process will work. No mechanism will prevent the kinds of problems you have in Kanawha County."

There was another aspect to the problem, that of educational quality. A Midwestern superintendent voiced it very well, "I think that this problem is a definite threat to the publishing area. If we allow this threat of complaints to cause 'nothing' books to be printed, we are in deep trouble."

So there are several dangers, all occurring at the same time and presenting both short and long term concerns for the schools. There is no time to wait and debate. You must plan and prepare for the challenges of censorship in the school well ahead of actual challenges.

A pluralistic society places unusually heavy demands on the school system that serves it. Powerful special interest groups are bound to arise and although they subscribe to America's formula of strength through diversity, they turn violent when they fail to impose their ideologies on everyone else. The most recent of many explosive issues involves the selection and use of textbooks and instructional materials. With emotions running high on the sensitive issues of censorship, alleged book burning, gag rules, and academic freedom, the quiet voice of reason is conspicuous by its absence. One such voice was heard recently and NASSP hopes that all parties to this increasingly bitter debate will consider the advice and counsel of U.S. Commissioner of Education Terrel H. Bell.

Addressing himself to the concerns of the Association of American Publishers, Dr. Bell acknowledged that publishers have obligations to their stockholders to produce instructional materials that will sell. He reminded them of their larger responsibility to students, parents, and communities. He also noted that parents

". . . have a right to expect that the schools, in their teaching approaches and selection of instructional materials, will support the values and standards that their children are taught at home. And if the schools cannot support those values they must at least avoid deliberate destruction of them."

The Commissioner commented further that some current juvenile literature emphasizes violence, obscenity, and moral judgments that run counter to American tradition, all in the name of "keeping up with the real world."

As new text and reference books are prepared, it is hoped that Commissioner Bell's advice will be heeded. At the same time a vigorous denunciation should be aimed at those who want us to turn the pages of history back to the tragic book-burning days of Hitler. What is needed is a return to reason and appropriate *balance*.

—Owen Kiernan, Executive Secretary, National Association of Secondary School Principals

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